

METRO CITIES

TASK FORCE ON METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE

Findings and Recommendations

January, 2012

INTRODUCTION

A Metro Cities Metropolitan Governance Task Force was created in 2011 to examine Metro Cities' legislative policies on regional governance and to make policy recommendations to the Metro Cities Board of Directors and membership.

The Metro Cities Board of Directors deemed a policy review to be timely given the release of the 2011 Legislative Audit on transit governance and recent legislative proposals to alter the governance structure of the Metropolitan Council.

The Task Force was comprised of 17 elected and appointed city officials from throughout the metropolitan area. Three meetings were held. Featured speakers included former Metropolitan Council Chairs Peter Bell and Ted Mondale, former Met Council Administrator Jim Solem, Metropolitan Council Government Affairs staff Judd Schetnan, and Legislative Auditor Judy Randall. The Task Force established a set of policy recommendations and findings that were subsequently adopted by the Metro Cities Board of Directors and membership in November, 2011.

BACKGROUND

Metro Cities is the region-wide entity representing the joint interests of metropolitan cities at the Metropolitan Council, Legislature and Executive Branch and works to advance policy positions that serve the interests of metropolitan area cities.

Metro Cities' policies support the existence of a regional government for the purposes of facilitating region wide planning and providing services that cannot be as effectively and efficiently provided by local governments or the state. Metro Cities' policies include positions on regional governance and Metropolitan Council policies and activities, and because of the unique and key relationships between the Metropolitan Council and cities, support the need for the Council to work collaboratively and in partnership with cities in the region.

Metro Cities' policies on regional governance have evolved over time, with many recent policies on governance the result of a previous task force undertaken by Metro Cities (Association of Metropolitan Municipalities) in 1998. The impetus for that study was the changing functions of the Metropolitan Council and restructuring of the Council in 1994. That AMM study developed several observations, principles and criteria regarding metropolitan governance, and recommended staggered terms for Metropolitan Council members. Metro Cities successfully

secured passage of staggered terms legislation in 2008; however the legislation was vetoed by Governor Tim Pawlenty.

Earlier this year, the Metro Cities Board of Directors convened an ad hoc group of Board members and staff to determine whether Metro Cities' legislative policies pertaining to regional governance warranted review.

The impetus for the Board's directive was twofold. Metro Cities' legislative policies on regional governance, particularly regarding the selection of Metropolitan Council members, were policies of long standing that notably did not address whether Metropolitan Council members should be appointed or elected. Recent legislative discussions and the release of the Legislative Auditor's report on transit governance prompted the Board to question whether Metro Cities' legislative policies on regional governance should be re-examined.

The ad hoc work group of the Metro Cities Board met in early April, and recommended a policy review under the direction of Metro Cities' Metropolitan Agencies Committee. This committee addresses policies and issues pertaining to the Metropolitan Council. It was determined that a task force of representatives of the Metropolitan Agencies Committee, augmented with additional city officials from throughout the region, be formed.

The Task Force met three times during the months of August and September and discussed key issues relating to regional governance at length. Task Force members identified a number of issues and priorities, based on a survey of Task Force members. These centered on goals and priorities for regional governance, opportunities and challenges facing the metropolitan region and its cities, the Council's strengths and weaknesses, whether the current Council is equipped to meet the needs of the region and its cities, and problems that might be addressed through a change in the governance model.

The Task Force recommendations were forwarded to the Metropolitan Agencies Committee, and subsequently adopted by the Metro Cities Board of Directors and full membership in November, 2011.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and recommendations of the Metro Cities Metro Governance Task Force include new legislative policies on principles for regional governance, Metropolitan Council member selection, a comprehensive analysis of the Metropolitan Council and legislative oversight of the Metropolitan Council. This report also includes findings and observations identified by Task Force members that should be considered in any evaluations, discussions or proposals regarding our system of regional governance.

The Task Force recommendations specifically emphasize the need for increased local involvement and participation in the selection process for members of the Metropolitan Council, to increase the accountability and credibility of the Metropolitan Council with local units of government. As the units of government most affected by regional policymaking, any regional governance changes to be particularly responsive to metropolitan area cities.

The Task Force recommendations continue support for a regional government and the need for an increase in accountability by the Metropolitan Council to local units of government.

The Task Force recommendations support a comprehensive study that includes a broad range of stakeholders and that looks forward in defining how the Metropolitan Council can best meet the needs of the region and its communities into the future. Any systematic changes to the governing structure of the Metropolitan Council should not be considered until a comprehensive analysis of the region's future needs is undertaken.

TASK FORCE FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

- Cities are the primary constituency of the Metropolitan Council and the entities most impacted by the statutes and policies relating to and governing the Metropolitan Council. As such, it is imperative that the Metropolitan Council work in partnership and collaboration with city governments.
- There should be more opportunities and formalized processes for local government involvement and participation in the work of the Metropolitan Council, including the selection of Metropolitan Council members, to help promote accountability, collaboration and problem solving among regional and local units of government.
- Any model of governance that proposes to have elected local officials serve on the Metropolitan Council (i.e. a Council of Governments model) must be a model under which city officials would make up the majority of local elected officials on the Metropolitan Council.

The Task Force does not recommend this model of governance for the Council, but members expressed strong opposition to any governance model under which county elected officials would represent a majority of local officials on the Metropolitan Council. The impacts of policy decision making by the Metropolitan Council fall most significantly onto city governments. Representation of county officials on the Metropolitan Council must only be considered under the premise that any county representation on the Metropolitan Council be commensurate with the involvement of counties in the statutory authority and policymaking activities of the Metropolitan Council. Task Force discussions identified several issues around potential conflicts of office and concluded these issues are potentially significant and must be resolved before this type of governance model is considered for the Metropolitan Council.

- Any changes to the overall governance structure of the Met Council must consider the impacts to the region and its governance as a whole, and not under any single function (i.e. transit).
- Any additional functions granted to the Council must have the input and support of metropolitan communities and be designed to respond to needs and services that cities cannot provide as efficiently or equitably.
- Regional level operation and planning functions should remain as integrated functions.

- Our system of regional governance deserves periodic evaluation as the needs of our region and its communities evolve and change.
- Greater recognition must be given to the fact the metropolitan region extends beyond the seven counties, and the critical issues relating to transportation, environment, and land use cannot be solved without the participation from adjacent counties.
- Any changes to the Council's structure or functions should be considered by a coalition of stakeholders that includes cities, counties, the business community and adjacent units of government. There should also be a means to involve local governments from the adjacent counties.
- This report recognizes the position of Metropolitan Council Chair is a full-time position and that as such the salary should reflect the actual needs and responsibilities of the position.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED LEGISLATIVE POLICIES

The Task Force recommends legislative policies that emphasize the following tenets:

- Continued support for Metropolitan Council member selection through appointment by the Governor;
- Strengthening local official involvement and input into the selection process for Metropolitan Council members through specific statutory changes to the nomination process through which local officials would make up the majority of nominating committee members, and which would require the Governor's adherence to the nominating committee's recommendations barring extraordinary circumstances;
- Continued support for staggered terms for Metropolitan Council members with the appointment of the Chair to coincide with the term of the Governor;
- Principles of regional governance that emphasize the importance of Metropolitan Council accountability to and collaboration with city governments;
- Support for a comprehensive and forward-looking analysis of the Metropolitan Council;
- Support for legislative oversight of the Metropolitan Council.

METRO CITIES ORGANIZATION

Metro Cities (the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities) was established in 1974 to represent metropolitan communities at the Metropolitan Council, and at the Legislature on statewide issues with regional significance. The organization is governed by a 19 member Board, whose members are comprised of local city officials from throughout the region.

The purpose for the organization is to represent the joint interests of metropolitan cities before the Metropolitan Council, State Legislature and Executive Branch, to promote collaborative problem solving efforts between and among cities and state and regional policymakers, to serve as a forum for the interchange of ideas and information among metro cities, and to foster inter-city cooperation.